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THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BRISTOL POLICE FORCE

by RODERICK WALTERS

ISSUED BY THE BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
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The next pamphlet in this series will be *The Politics of Emancipation: Bristol and the Abolition of Slavery* by Professor Peter Marshall of the University of Manchester.

Eight of the pamphlets in this series have appeared in book form under the title of *Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Patrick McGrath, and published by David and Charles. The book is now available at £1.50.

A full list of publications is given on the inside back cover.

The Branch regrets that owing to continually rising costs it has been forced to raise the price of this pamphlet to 40p.

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The Establishment of The Bristol Police Force

by RODERICK WALTERS

On 25 June 1836 the new Bristol Constabulary, numbering 232, commenced its duties in the city. The problem of effective policing was one that concerned the whole of the country, and although the subject cannot be considered in detail here, it is necessary to mention some of the national difficulties in order to put the achievements of Bristol into a wider context.

The methods of policing most of England and Wales in the early nineteenth century had changed little since Tudor times — at least in theory. The basis of the system was the part-time unpaid parish constable who was usually elected annually by the vestry. Supervision by chief or head constables meant little. Night Watchmen were very often appointed in the boroughs. In the course of the eighteenth century this system collapsed in London, in many boroughs, and in most of the new urban areas of the industrial north and midlands. There were three main reasons for this. Firstly, the position of constable came to be regarded with contempt. Anyone who could possibly afford to pay a deputy to perform the duties did so, or else paid a fine for refusing to accept the office. In 1714, Defoe wrote of the office of constable as “an unsupportable hardship”, and general reluctance to serve meant that “by the end of the eighteenth century many of the men who served as parish constables . . . were at best illiterate fools and at worst as corrupt as the criminal classes from which not a few

sprang.”⁽¹⁾ In addition, the doubling of Britain’s population in the eighteenth century had a profound effect. The expansion of London, of many urban areas and of suburbs outside the jurisdiction of corporate boroughs, meant that much of England’s population was housed in squalid slums. This had the effect both of increasing the opportunities for crime and mob disorder and also of breaking down the community ties and sense of communal responsibility upon which the old arrangement of gratuitous service in parish offices relied. Further there was often lack of respect for some of the Justices of the Peace, although corrupt and criminal characters on the Bench were largely confined to London.

Crime became an accepted occupation for a large section of society. Riot and disorder had to be dealt with by the military—a situation as unpopular with the military as with the population at large. The early nineteenth century could thus be described as “the golden age of gangsterdom”⁽²⁾ and as “an epoch of criminality”⁽³⁾ for England.

There were attempts to rectify this situation. Societies for “moral regeneration” were established, while the penal system became savagely harsher. Comprehensive plans for police reform were largely confined to London, since it was both the seat of government and had the most pressing problems, but local schemes were put forward in many parts of the country. Local Improvement Acts were obtained to provide for the watching of specific districts, and this method was used over 200 times prior to 1830. Another expedient was the employment of watchmen or constables by groups of residents associating for the purpose.

Nevertheless, it is true to say that there was no widespread movement for the general reform of borough police. The re-structuring of the police came as a subsidiary of Municipal Reform, itself a natural sequel to the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832.

“The Police establishment of Bristol is exceedingly defective”, said the Municipal Corporations Commissioners in 1835.⁽⁴⁾ Others had said this earlier. A letter to a local journal in 1820, signed “Z”, spoke of the “lamentable state” of the police and hoped for a “new, united and consequently cheap and efficient”

(1). T. A. Critchley, *A History of Police in England and Wales*, p. 18-19.

(2). E. C. Midwinter, *Victorian Social Reform*, p.14.

(3). W. Melville-Lee, *A History of Police in England*, p.203.

(4). *Report of the Royal Commission on Municipal Corporations*. Bristol (M.C.C.R.), p.32.

force.⁽¹⁾ In 1822 "N" thought the force "either miserably inefficient or criminally negligent", and hoped that a new "Bourbon" force would arrest every "vagrant, beggar and prostitute, every man, woman or child of suspicious appearance."⁽²⁾ In 1820 the inhabitants of College Green formed a local vigilante group, armed with "bludgeon, dirk and pistol." This awareness of police inadequacy seems to have transcended political considerations. In 1835 the Town Clerk told the House of Lords that the police force was "altogether inefficient to its purposes", and three years earlier the *Bristol Mercury*, although hostile to the Tory corporation, conceded that some sort of police reform was necessary. Even *The Times*, reporting the Riots of 1831, stated that a new efficient police establishment was needed. In short, "all parties at Bristol agree that the Police of the city is wholly inadequate."⁽³⁾

In 1835 the total police body numbered 307 men, comprising 12 chief constables, 136 petty or ward constables, 15 night constables, 115 night watchmen, 12 day-constables and 17 Corporate officers, such as the Mayor's Sergeants and the Sheriff's Beadles, who were sworn in as constables but whose duties were purely official and ceremonial. The 12 day-constables were the only force appointed and financed by the Corporation to perform peace-keeping duties, and their appointment in 1832 had supposedly been on a temporary basis. The only other contributions to the policing of the city by the Corporation were the appointment of two "Inspectors of nuisances" to examine vehicles and report obstructions, and the annual appointment of a "Committee for regulating the Police of this city." However, the Inspectors were useless figures of fun, and the Committee never met.

Chief and ward constables were appointed annually by the Mayor and Aldermen in Petty Sessions. Effectively, appointments rested with the Aldermen of each ward, although chief constables had considerable influence in the appointment of their own successors and ward constables. These officers were unpaid except for fees for specific tasks. Aldermen supervised the chief constables in their respective wards, and the chief constables in turn superintended ward constables and night constables, while the latter were to supervise watchmen. Each ward had one chief constable and varying numbers of ward constables, dependent upon the size of the ward. St. James had the highest number, thirty; St. Ewen the lowest, seven. Ward constables visited public houses, but

(1). *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 23 December 1820.

(2). *Ibid.* 16 November 1822.

(3). M.C.C.R., p.33.

generally acted only when called upon to do so for some specific purpose.

Night constables and watchmen were appointed separately for each ward and were paid 17 shillings and 10 shillings per week respectively, financed on the basis of a poor rate. All except the two largest wards had only one night constable. The finances of the watch were poorly organised, some chief constables apparently setting the rate as they saw fit, others getting into debt. Of the twelve day-constables, two were on permanent duty at the Council House.

In addition to the permanent police establishment, special constables were sworn in temporarily for particular purposes: 300, for example, at the time of the 1831 Riots, 200 for the 1831 elections.

Standards among individual members of the police establishment were generally low. In four months of 1832, there were in one ward alone eleven instances of watchmen being found drunk or asleep on duty, while a newspaper claimed that police officers were appointed from the servants of members of the Corporation and "continue to be employed as waiters at dinners, routs and card parties."⁽¹⁾ Indeed, in April 1827 a watchman was sentenced to death for housebreaking.

Much inefficiency was also caused by factors unconnected with the police body. Indeed, nearly all complaints about the police before 1835 also mention the difficulty constables encountered in finding a magistrate to hear the case against prisoners, who were, as a result, often released. The appointment of a stipendiary magistrate to counter the laxity and non-residence of corporate magistrates was seen to be a vital accompaniment of police reform. The magistrates placed "more faith in punishment than prevention,"⁽²⁾ and the Webbs claimed of the police "its inefficiency was rendered far worse by Aldermanic jobbery."⁽³⁾

Neither police officers nor the Corporation could do anything about one of the greatest difficulties in policing Bristol. Large parts of the conurbation were outside the jurisdiction of the Corporation and its magistracy. Bedminster, in Somerset, had 7 unpaid officers to control a largely working class population which was over

(1). *Felix Farley*, 18 November, 1826.

(2). G. W. A. Bush, *The Old and the New: The Corporation of Bristol 1820-1851*, unpublished Bristol Ph.D. thesis, 1965.

(3). S. & B. Webb. *English Local Government*. Vol. III, p.474.

13,000 in the early 1830's. Felons had to be transported to Wells or Taunton for trial. St. Philip and Jacob's population of over 15,000 was policed by 15 constables, with no night watchmen. Thus crime was frequent in the outparishes, which also provided ideal refuges for criminals wanted in the borough itself. The wealthy parish of Clifton was well policed under its local Act, but the Municipal Corporation Report of 1835 noted that "the Police of the Suburbs of Bristol is still more defective than that of the city."⁽¹⁾ This problem was the main reason for the Commissioners recommending that the outparishes be brought under the control of the borough authorities.

It would be misleading to imagine that nothing had been attempted to improve Bristol's police. The inhabitants as a whole, and even the Corporation itself, had made a number of attempts to improve the system. The Corporation sought watching powers unsuccessfully in 1738 and 1748, and there had been legislation in 1755 despite considerable political opposition. In 1787 the Corporation failed in an attempt to improve the watch because there was hostility to an increase in the Corporation's powers.

At a meeting of the Mayor and Aldermen on Christmas Eve 1830, the Mayor spoke of representations made concerning the inadequacy of the watch. This, it was said, was caused by insufficient numbers, lack of inter-parochial co-operation and the "limited sphere of authority of the individuals employed."⁽²⁾ It had been suggested to the justices that the answer was to introduce a new police system "founded upon that adopted in the Metropolis . . . for the preservation of the public peace, the protection of property, the detection of crime and the suppression of vagrancy."⁽³⁾ The Mayor and Aldermen agreed with the sentiments expressed and outlined a plan for reform, to be submitted to the churchwardens and to the ratepayers. It was agreed to adopt the plan if it met with general approval.

The scheme involved setting up a force of 171 full-time officers, financed by a new rate. The cost would be in the region of £7,500 a year compared with the cost of £4,500 in 1830.

The suggestions were transmitted to the vestries. Meetings discussed the proposal, "expressing in almost every instance objection to the proposed plan."⁽⁴⁾ Some preferred to improve the existing

(1). M.C.C.R., p.38.

(2). Letter in Bristol Record Office, reference 17133, "To Churchwardens of Vestry of Parish of St. James."

(3). *Ibid.*

(4). M.C.C.R., p.34.

system without great expense; others resented the erosion of the powers of ward authorities. Others claimed that the police would be an unconstitutional force, while a great number objected to the scheme because it increased the power and patronage of the Corporation. Most objectors considered the appointment of a stipendiary magistrate to be a vital accompaniment of any reforms. In the face of almost unanimous opposition, the Corporation meekly abandoned its proposals on the eve of the destructive Riots of 1831.

The Riots of 1831 clearly demonstrated the inadequacies of Bristol's police.⁽¹⁾ The Special Constables enrolled were described as "bludgeon men" and did more to provoke disorder than prevent it, as did at least one unit of troops. Because of lack of inter-parochial co-operation, reinforcements, relief or refreshments, as well as because of fear, most of the permanent officers and the Special Constables disappeared after a few hours. The breakdown of authority was almost complete. The Commanding Officer of the military would act only on the specific orders of the Mayor, who would give such orders only with the support of the Aldermen, and they were nowhere to be found. Not only was the police establishment unable to deal with the situation, but the local authorities were incapable of directing the efforts of those who were supposed to enforce the law.

The violence of 1831 was also important for the effect it had upon attitudes towards police reform. The Corporation immediately set up the Committee to consider police reform, and many articles and pamphlets about the Riots stressed the need. The fear that trouble might recur explains much of the conciliatory spirit shown by both the Corporation and the parish representatives in 1832 compared with a year earlier. One senses a closing of the ranks among the propertied classes in the aftermath of the Riots and this was demonstrated by the desire of a pamphleteer to get police reform before "party spirit will gain ascendancy."⁽²⁾

After the Riots of 1831, one of Bristol's M.Ps. Edward Protheroe, proposed legislation to reform Bristol Corporation, and his Bill included some measures to improve the police. It placed the outparishes under the control of the city, and also asked for "the police to be organised on the Westminster principle but be

(1). For the riots, see Susan Thomas, *The Bristol Riots*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1974.

(2). *Remarks Suggested by Recent Events and on the Necessity of an Efficient Police in this City*. A Householder, Bristol, Nov. 1831.

under the control of the Corporate magistrates.”⁽¹⁾ However, Protheroe’s Bill was withdrawn, probably after he had been told of the Government’s intention to look into the whole problem of Municipal Reform.

The Committee to consider police reform was set up by the Corporation at its first meeting after the Riots. The Corporation showed itself both more thorough and more flexible than it had been a year earlier. It allowed members of the Central Committee of Parochial Deputies to examine the Corporation’s accounts and to confer with the Corporation on police reform. The Corporation also agreed to publish its accounts annually.

There was widespread agreement among those consulted about the form of the new force. The Committee set up declared that the new body should be “similar to that of the Metropolitan police in both construction and regulation.”⁽²⁾ It was upon the control and financing of the new force that disputes were to centre. The initial proposal was that the force would be under the general control of commissioners appointed by the Corporation, and that a stipendiary magistrate should regulate the force along with Aldermen. The Corporation agreed to pay £1,500 per annum towards the cost of the proposals, and “in a liberal and conciliating spirit”⁽³⁾ conferred with the Parochial Deputies. Plans were made to arrange with Gloucester and Somerset for the policing of the outparishes. By March 1832 the Corporation had thrashed out a plan to reform the police of the whole conurbation and it was so keen to put it into effect that it offered an extra £500 towards the prosecution of criminals and dropped many controversial demands arising out of the Riots.

Despite this enthusiasm, the Bill foundered over the methods of financing the force. The Deputies doubted the ability of the Corporation to pay the sums it offered, in view of the recently-revealed deficit of £3,000. In addition, the Corporation wanted the force to be financed out of a county rate, while the Deputies said the Corporation should first prove its inability to pay. To this the Corporation replied that its funds were not public stock. Thus, the inability or unwillingness of the Corporation to foot the bill, and the reluctance of the Deputies to open up “an illimitable field of future taxation”⁽⁴⁾ rendered agreement impossible.

(1). *Bristol Gazette*, 16 Feb. 1832.

(2). Bristol Record Office, reference 09327 (i), *Proceedings of the Committee for the Establishment of a permanent Police in the City of Bristol*, p.12.

(3). M.C.C.R., p.34.

(4). *Bristol Mercury* 2 June 1832.

Although the Corporation and Parochial Deputies agreed over the form of the new police establishment, there were those who objected. The *Bristol Mercury* on 20 March 1832 agreed that police reform was necessary but claimed that the existing system should be improved, both to minimise the cost and to prevent any increase in the powers of the magistracy. It also doubted the ability of the Corporation to pay the sums it promised, which it referred to as a "drop in the bucket." A correspondent in the same issue listed several reasons why the proposals should be withdrawn, including the imminent reform of local government and the opinion that police reform was not Bristol's most urgent problem. In a later issue, a correspondent prayed that "nothing so abortive as our intended police bill . . . will be allowed to pass the House of Commons."⁽¹⁾ An editorial soon appeared claiming that the Bill was supported only by the Corporation which wished to increase its power and patronage, by bankers who wanted to protect their property at others' expense, and by "a few bilious Tories"⁽²⁾ who hoped to prevent liberal reforms. The following week the *Mercury* concluded that the proposed force would be "rather a provocative to, than a preventive of, violence."⁽³⁾

Meeting opposition from so many quarters, the Corporation abandoned its Bill, consoling itself in July 1832 with the appointment of twelve day-constables at its own expense.

It is clear, then, that Bristol had for some time been aware of the inadequacies of the city's police, but that towards the end of the life of the old system of local government, the Corporation itself was incapable of doing enough to overcome the difficulties. When after a long period of inactivity, the Corporation stirred itself and tried to reorganise the police, the inhabitants resisted the plans with considerable success. The Municipal Corporations Commissioners recognised the problem. The citizens intended neither to "increase the public burthens of the city," nor to place "any power or patronage . . . in the hands of the Common Council."⁽⁴⁾ The second reason was probably even more important than the first.

It was the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 which made it possible to reorganise Bristol's police force. Basically, the Act swept away the old borough corporations and replaced them with

(1). *Ibid* 28 April 1832.

(2). *Ibid* 26 May 1832.

(3). *Ibid* 2 June 1832.

(4). M.C.C.R. p.34.

new, representatively elected councils which were allotted specific functions and powers. These bodies were also created in newer urban areas named in the Act, and provision was made for the future incorporation of other boroughs.

Those towns involved were obliged to appoint from among the elected council a Watch Committee. This Committee was to appoint a "sufficient number of fit men" to act as constables to prevent crime and preserve peace. The Committee must issue regulations for the police and had the powers of appointing and dismissing constables, who were also to obey the justices. The police powers of local improvement commissions were extinguished. The Committees were to despatch quarterly reports to the Home Office concerning the size, equipment, pay and regulation of the force. Of vital importance to Bristol, the outparishes were united with the city.

Perhaps more important than what the Act said was what it did not say. It made no mention of the number of officers or their payment and it did not stipulate they should be full-time.

The relative powers of Home Office, Watch Committee and Magistracy were left undefined, as was the question of superior officers to co-ordinate the new police. The Act was not primarily concerned with police matters, and in effect it left many of the details of police organisation to be decided by local conditions and circumstances. Police forces were allowed to evolve in different ways in different localities.

Municipal elections were held in Bristol in December 1835. The newly elected Council set up at its first full meeting on 1 January 1836 a "Police Committee" to make investigations regarding the type and size of police organisation required. This Committee communicated with Bath, Gloucester and Manchester on police matters. It decided to obtain the assistance of an "intelligent officer of a superior class in the London police, to perambulate the borough" (1) and give his opinion as to the city's needs. The Mayor wrote to the Home Office, and Mr. Joseph Bishop arrived on 22 January. He did his job thoroughly and quickly, and by 9 February the Council had his report. He was then appointed Superintendent of Police for Bristol at a salary of £350.

At a Council meeting on 16 May the final report of the Police Committee was received. There were to be four station houses. The main City Station was to be in the Guard House in Wine Street. There was to be a Clifton station on Brandon Hill; a St. Philips and Jacobs station opposite Trinity Church, and a Bed-

(1). *Bristol Gazette*, 28 January 1836.

minster station to be sited in Turnpike Road. Temporary sites were used until the three suburban stations were completed. Each station, City, Clifton, St. Philips and Bedminster, was to have one Inspector and six sergeants; the number of constables was 67, 53, 40 and 38 respectively. Constables were to patrol fixed "beats" at a stipulated speed according to a strict rota. The force was split into day and night sections with staggered off-duty periods. Inspectors were to be paid £1 10s. per week, sergeants £1 1s. and constables 16s. The clerk, with sergeant's rank, was to receive £1 4s. 6d. Thus the earnings of a constable compared favourably with the earnings of urban labourers and household servants, from which groups most of the subordinate officers came.

To recruit the officers required, "every possible publicity" was given in Bristol and its environs.⁽¹⁾ A total of 567 applied, but only 233 were eventually approved for appointment. Applicants had to supply their name, address and previous employment in their own handwriting. They were interviewed by the Watch Committee, and there was a medical examination. If they were considered suitable at this stage, enquiries were made from their last employer and others about their general character and their "sobriety, honesty and temper."⁽²⁾ A check was made that applicants had paid their rent. When all investigations were satisfactorily concluded, the applicant was considered fit for appointment. Of 233 so approved, 208 were under 35 and at least 5 feet 7 inches tall. The remainder were ex-servicemen or police officers whose experience made them valuable despite physical drawbacks. 227 were needed for initial service, the remainder were to be appointed as vacancies occurred.

Of the 204 applicants approved for appointment as constables, just over ten per cent gave their addresses as outside Bristol, mainly in Somerset, Gloucester and Wiltshire. One came from London. Previous occupations were very varied. Most numerous were 53 "labourers" and 19 "servants", but there were also 10 shoemakers, 5 farmers, one "gentleman" and a jeweller, as well as a collection of soapboilers, brewers, ropemakers, cordwinders and butchers.

There seems to have been no pattern of recruitment from particular trades, industries or services.

Each officer was equipped with a cape, greatcoat, frock-coat, trousers, boots, top hat, stock, button brushes, truncheon, rattle and a lamp. In addition, 50 cutlasses and 24 handcuffs were kept

(1). Bristol Record Office, ref. 04856(i), Watch Committee Proceedings (W.C.P.), vol. 1, p.9.

(2). W.C.P. vol. 1, p.11.

at the stations. The clothing and equipment were said to correspond "in all respects with those furnished to the Metropolitan Police."⁽¹⁾

On the same day as the Council accepted the Police Committee Report, the Watch Committee was appointed, mainly from those who had served on the Police Committee. Most of its members were among the leading lights of the new Council.⁽²⁾ This, and the fact that the Committee was balanced between the parties, suggests that the Council attached considerable importance to the problem of policing the city. There was apparently little disagreement within the Council over the form of the force, though there were complaints, especially by the Liberal chemist Councillor William Herapath, that salary estimates were too high. Herapath advocated paying the constables 14 shillings per week and clothing them more cheaply, but the Mayor told him "You must give the men something which will put them above temptation."⁽³⁾

The Watch Committee continued the work of organising the new force. The most important aspect was the drawing up of the "Regulation Book of Police." This was over 50 pages, and included rules and advice for all ranks. It stated that officers were to devote all their time to police duties and were to receive no gifts or gratuities, not even charitable or insurance relief, without the consent of the Committee. As well as warning officers of the dangers in public houses and brothels, and of the necessity of avoiding them unless in the course of duty, the book also expressed the view that "The Principal Object of the Police Establishment is the Prevention of Crime". It suggested that the most valuable asset for an officer was "a perfect command of temper." In short, the regulation book provided both for the day-to-day running of the force and also expressed more fundamental aims and long term ambitions.

The Watch Committee decided that the force should commence its duties on 25 June 1836.

From the beginning, the force faced problems of manning. There was a very high turnover of officers, 3 sergeants and 9 constables declining to accept appointment before duties commenced. The situation did not improve after duties began. Eight officers left in

(1). W.C.P. Vol. 1, p. 59.

(2). G.W.A. Bush, *op. cit.* p.421.

(3). *Bristol Gazette*, 11 February 1836.

the first week, seven in the second and four in the third. This continued for several years. Most vacancies arose out of resignations or dismissals for disciplinary reasons, although not all, since P.C. Mullowney was dismissed as being "incapable of duty from imbecility of mind."⁽¹⁾ Several officers obtained posts elsewhere, at least two going to the new force at Newport, while the clerk threatened to join the Metropolitan force if his pay and rank were not raised. The governor of the gaol also attracted some police officers. This problem was one of the reasons given in January 1840 for the restructuring of the pay scales to encourage long service. Nevertheless, Bristol continued to attract applicants from a wide geographical area. Some ex-constables were re-instated upon request, although at least as many were refused, and the physical requirements for appointment were not lowered. Fortunately, there was no shortage of applicants, and posts were filled speedily despite the fact that not until April 1839 was there a weekly Committee meeting which did not have to deal with vacancies. Even this was not a turning point, although the situation improved gradually. In 1837, according to Watch Committee records, 69 constables were dismissed, 169 were fined and 39 resigned. In 1848 the corresponding figures were 28, 134 and 24.

Closely connected with this problem was the matter of discipline. The Superintendent, the Watch Committee and the magistrates kept a tight rein. Fines were widely used, as well as demotion, suspension and dismissal. Many punishments seem harsh, others lenient. P.C. Clay was dismissed after being "found asleep in a privy"⁽²⁾ while P.C. Stock, for "using unnecessary violence"⁽³⁾ on a prisoner, was merely fined 2s. 3d. Drunkenness was the most common offence, and always resulted in dismissal. Care was taken to protect the moral reputation of the force, and many constables were dismissed merely for talking to prostitutes, even if they had not gone so far as the constable found "in a brothel in Tower Lane, in uniform."⁽⁴⁾ One constable was dismissed and another reprimanded for "living in sin." More unusual reasons for disciplinary measures include conviction for criminal offences, accepting rewards without permission and trying to influence the prosecutor to drop a case. The week beginning 27 April 1837, ten months after the force had begun to operate, was the first in which no constables were dismissed, and even then four were fined.

One interesting aspect of Bristol's police organisation is the fact

(1). W.C.P. Vol. 1, p. 79.

(2). W.C.P. Vol 1, p. 277.

(3). *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 163.

(4). *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 465.



The entrance to the Guard House in Wine Street, the first headquarters of the Bristol Constabulary.

From a drawing by Pocock by courtesy of the City Art Gallery.



A watchman or Charley, the predecessor of the policeman.

By courtesy of the City Archivist.



Policeman's uniform, 1836, from a drawing by Mrs. Alex Spencer.
By courtesy of the City Museum.

HIS REMUNERATION.

His Pay will be sixteen shillings per week ; but 1s. per day will be deducted when sick, and in cases where such sickness arises from his own indiscretion or misconduct, he shall forfeit the whole of his Pay until he is allowed to resume his duty.

The following Articles of Clothing will be supplied to him for his use during the time he may continue in the Police, but on quitting the service, he shall give up every article of Clothing and Appointment complete, clean, and in good repair; if in the opinion of the Superintendent, any of such articles of Clothing or Appointments are not in proper repair, or have been wilfully damaged, or improperly used, such a sum of money shall be deducted from his Pay as will repair the damaged article or supply a new one.

Yearly Issue on the 24th of June.	{	1 Blue Coat
		1 Pair of Dress Trousers
		1 Ditto Boots
		1 Hat
		1 Armlet.
Extra Issue in each Year on the 21st of Dec.	{	1 Pair of Undress Trousers
		1 Ditto Boots.

Every second Year on the 24th of June. { 1 Great Coat
1 Cape
1 Stock

The old Clothing is to be returned when the new Clothing is given out.

CONDUCT WHEN ON DUTY.

He must be civil and attentive to persons of every rank and class; insolence or incivility will not be overlooked; he must not enter into conversation with any one except on matters relating to his duty, when he must refer the party to the Inspector for information; HE IS PARTICULARLY DESIRED NOT TO ENTER INTO CONVERSATION WITH FEMALE SERVANTS OR OTHER WOMEN WHEN ON DUTY, OR TO WALK OR CONVERSE WITH HIS COMRADES; when these meet him, he is merely to exchange a word and pass on; he must be particularly cautious not to interfere unnecessarily with others; when required to act he must do so with decision and calmness, (remembering that no qualification is more indispensable to a Police Officer than a perfect command of temper,) and never suffer

The Regulation Book of the Bristol Constabulary, 1836.

By courtesy of the City Archivist

that although officers were required to devote the whole of their time to police duties, they were allowed to attend private functions as police officers and be paid by the organisers. Thus we find officers in attendance at St. James' Fair, the opening of the Zoological Gardens, the ceremony for laying the foundation stone of the Victoria Rooms and the Clifton and Bristol Races. However, not all requests for police manpower were favourably received by the Committee. The Directors of the Bristol and Exeter Railway and the Thornbury Horticultural Committee were informed that it was undesirable for constables to be employed outside the city. The Committee also disapproved of police attendance at masquerade balls, since such entertainments were "highly prejudicial to the morals of the lower classes."⁽¹⁾ Payments for this type of work averaged between three and five shillings per day, sergeants and inspectors however receiving more than constables.

Officers were also generally allowed to keep the many gratuities offered by the public, provided they asked permission. Most of these rewards were for specified services such as "impounding a pig" or firefighting, and, indeed, the Committee ordered the return of two Christmas gifts given for no specific reason. These gratuities were usually of a few shillings, although some were much larger. Sergeant Webb, for example, received £5 for apprehending a felon. Rewards were also given by the Committee itself, such as the five shillings given to P.C. Bennett "for his general good conduct on his Beat." These various payments must have given a considerable boost to the earnings of all officers, especially of the constables who were earning only sixteen shillings per week.

The most important organisational change of the force's early years came in January 1840 when the pay system was reformed to give wages for constables ranging from twelve shillings per week for a six month probationary period up to eighteen shillings after three years' service. It was hoped that this would encourage longer service and make the pay level competitive with other police forces without adding greatly to the total cost.

The anxiety of the authorities to control and supervise the men is demonstrated by three particular incidents. In drawing up the Regulation Book, the Committee included the instruction that inspectors and sergeants were to visit public houses near the Council House when the magistrates were meeting and to "report such constables as are found drinking with the parties who are concerned in any case." Again, in November 1837, the Committee agreed to consider a petition for more pay which had been signed

(1). *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 407.

by many constables, but at the same time it instructed the Superintendent to find out who organised the petition. As a result, the main organiser, P.C. Baker, was severely reprimanded and the request rejected. The third incident was the suspension and reprimanding of Sergeant Knox for being too friendly with his men and for drinking and gambling with them.⁽¹⁾ Thus it is obvious that superior officers and members of the Committee were determined to be in full control and to enforce rigid, almost military, discipline and distinction of rank.

Public reaction to the force was varied. It seems that some people soon attempted to stir up public feelings against the police. At a meeting of the magistrates on 7 November 1836, the Mayor spoke of "attempts . . . to prejudice the public mind against the police," but went on to express great satisfaction with the force, which, he said, had performed their "difficult and most unpleasant duties" extremely "faithfully, honestly and with less manifestation of severity than could have been expected."⁽²⁾ Watch Committee records contain many glowing reports concerning the police, such as one from a Grand Jury, which was "much gratified"⁽³⁾ and another from Sir Charles Williams of H.M. Court of Bankruptcy who thought the "capacity, activity and civility" of Inspector Bosworth typical of the force.⁽⁴⁾

However, there is also widespread evidence in Committee records, in reports of magistrates' meetings and in local journals that not everyone thought quite so highly of the police. There are innumerable complaints of assault, wrongful arrest, undue exercise of authority and simple ineptitude. The authorities responsible for discipline were always careful to be seen to hear such accusations, but often found no case to answer, or else inflicted trifling punishments. The magistrates even backed the police against a Somerset J.P. who accused them of a "wanton outrage" in operating outside Bristol at Pill, and there beating innocent women and children in the streets.⁽⁵⁾ The *Bristol Mercury* was vociferous in its attacks upon the police, frequently complaining of wrongful arrest and assault, and claiming that the authorities refused to see any wrong in the actions of the force. It gave details of a case of wrongful arrest by a constable which was hushed up by his colleagues.⁽⁶⁾ This journal concluded one article thus: "the police . . . are not

(1). *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 392.

(2). *Bristol Gazette*, 10 November 1836.

(3). W.C.P., Vol. I, p. 234.

(4). *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 416.

(5). *Bristol Gazette*, 3 October 1836.

(6). *Bristol Mercury*, 22 August 1840.

above the reach of the law . . . (and) the blue coat or ornamented collar confers no infallibility upon its wearer.”⁽¹⁾

To try to establish the effectiveness of police reform in Bristol, three yardsticks will be used. First, we can examine the view of contemporaries whose opinions we can see to be based upon experience and insight. Secondly, we can compare the force with others set up about the same time, especially the Metropolitan Police, acknowledged as a model for keen reforming authorities. Lastly, we can examine in some detail the performance of the new force when faced with the particular problem of Chartism and compare this with the performance of the old police when faced with the Riots of 1831.

One person who had considerable experience of police affairs was Francis Mallalieu of the Metropolitan Police who was seconded to Bristol for a short time in 1839 and who also served in the colonies. In 1839 he wrote in a report to the Watch Committee of the “great efficiency” of the force in matters of “ordinary routine” and “immediate suppression of . . . disturbance from riotous . . . persons.”⁽²⁾ He also complimented the men on their drill, preparedness, intelligence, discretion, vigilance and attentiveness to duty. Then, in 1852, he told a Select Committee that although Bristol had the unsatisfactory system of a force controlled by a Watch Committee, the new force was “a great improvement” upon the old,⁽³⁾ and that those responsible for running it did as good a job as could be expected anywhere. More praise for the Bristol force came from Sir George Grey, speaking in the Commons in the debate on the Police (Counties and Boroughs) Bill, in 1856. The Bill was intended to improve the police nationally, but Grey mentioned Bristol as one of the places which needed no improvement.⁽⁴⁾

Comparisons with contemporary forces set up elsewhere can be illuminating. It has been suggested by a modern police historian that the only meaningful way of judging the achievements of the new borough forces is by comparing them to the London force in specific ways.⁽⁵⁾ Incidentally, she also points out that nearly half the boroughs obliged to set up a force in 1835 had still not done so two years after the Act was passed. This fact alone shows that Bristol was more keen in this respect than many boroughs.

(1). *Ibid.*, 13 November 1841.

(2). W.C.P. Vol. II, p. 152.

(3). Parliamentary Papers 1852-53 (715) XXXVI 161.

(4). Parliamentary Debates, Vol. CXL c. 2128.

(5). J. M. Hart, “Reform of the Borough Police 1835-1856”, *English Historical Review*, 1955.

London had a ratio of police to population of about 1 to 450 or 500 in the 1830's and 1840's. This was the country's best figure, the national borough average being 1 to 900 in 1841. The ratio in Bristol in 1841 was about 1 to 530, but in nearby Newport it was 1 to 3,000,⁽¹⁾ and in Leeds, 1 to 1,100.⁽²⁾ Whereas Bristol sought the advice of a Metropolitan officer in 1836 and followed it exactly, Wigan, which had been advised to have a force of forty, decided to manage with six.⁽³⁾

Bristol followed London's example in breaking as clearly as possible with the past and employing only those ex-constables and watchmen who could satisfy the new requirements. Many towns decided to rely upon the old officers. In Leeds, for example, in 1836 the Head Constable and all four Inspectors of the "new" force were in fact ex-watchmen. Bristol's force patrolled the whole borough from the very beginning, doing better in this respect than Hull, Sheffield and even London. Northampton had separate day and night forces until 1848, while Newport decided in 1836 to do without a night force to save money. Only one fifth of all boroughs received help from the Metropolitan force before 1838, and so Bristol, which acquired the services of Mr. Bishop permanently early in 1836, showed keenness and drive.

There were frequent complaints, especially to a Select Committee in 1852, about lack of co-operation between police forces. Bristol, however, from the first setting up of the Police Committee in 1836 was eager to communicate with other authorities on police problems, and helped Bath with the establishment of a police force in 1840. Watch Committee records give ample evidence of co-operation with other forces all over the West of England and South Wales, and as far afield as Birmingham.

The Chartist agitation which in 1838 and 1839 caused so much trouble in the North of England and in areas as close to Bristol as Bath and Newport had remarkably little effect upon Bristol, especially considering the city's disposition to riot which had been demonstrated in 1793 and 1831. No doubt there are valid social and economic factors which help to explain this, but it seems very likely that the preparedness, industry and intelligence of the police authorities in Bristol was a significant factor. At one of the earliest meetings of the Chartists in Bristol, held in the Guildhall with the Mayor's consent, William Morgan complained of the "bastile police," and, as Felix Farley commented, "perhaps he had felt

(1). I. Bale, *Through Seven Reigns—A History of Newport Borough Police*.

(2). See Appendix.

(3). E. C. Midwinter, *Victorian Social Reform*, p. 41.

their efficiency.”⁽¹⁾ When Morgan was arrested some months later, a crowd, estimated at 2-3,000 armed men, was afraid to rescue him, apparently because of “the firm front of the police.”⁽²⁾ The authorities were very careful in their plans to deal with the Chartists. Arms were ordered discreetly, so as not to arouse undue concern or hostility, as had the preparations undertaken before the Riots of 1831. When the whole force was needed to control a procession on Boxing Day 1838, the Committee was careful to provide refreshments to avoid the absenteeism so disastrous in 1831. In May 1839, Superintendent Mallalieu drew up a lengthy memorandum to deal with any problems which might arise out of the Chartists’ activity. Officers were warned to do nothing to provoke trouble by indiscreet conduct, again no doubt with the events of 1831 in mind. With such careful and thorough preparations, it is hardly surprising that “as far as Bristol went, the Chartists regarded themselves as potential victims rather than aggressors.”⁽³⁾

Thus the police force of Bristol, as far as it is possible to judge, was of a very high standard. Not only was it stronger than most others, but also it made a conscious effort to copy the Metropolitan force in all ways possible. The Superintendent, although he was under control of the Watch Committee, was usually taken notice of and given a fairly free hand. Moreover, he was appointed on merit, not for his political or personal connections. The episode of the Chartist agitation, which left Bristol almost entirely peaceful compared with scenes of mob rule and military action elsewhere, is ample evidence of the change which had come over the peace-keeping establishment of the city since the destruction of the Riots less than ten years earlier.

Bristol was also quite willing to spend considerable sums of money upon the police of the city. It increased the size of the force in 1845, whereas many authorities, including Birmingham, Bath, and Salford, reduced the size. The Committee also increased the salaries of the Superintendent, Clerk and Surgeon on merit. Bristol compares favourably with most other boroughs in terms of spending on its police force. In 1841, Bristol was spending £55 per year on each officer compared with a national borough average of £33 in 1851 and figures of £71, £57, £45, and £23 in Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle and Sheffield respectively (see Appendix). Bristol at this time spent approximately two shillings per head of population each year on policing, whereas the national borough average was

(1). *Felix Farley*, 16 June 1838.

(2). *The Times*, 29 April 1839.

(3). J. Cannon, *The Chartists in Bristol*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, p. 2.

about 1s. 4d. Other towns vary from the exceptional figure of 2s. 10d. for Birmingham to one shilling for Leeds, 5d. for Bradford (Yorks) and 4d. for Sheffield. Thus, Bristol was well above the national average, and, although concerned not to overspend, cannot be said to have been unreasonable in the amounts it was willing to devote to police purposes.

An attempt must be made to put these local events into a wider national context. The example of Bristol may throw light on some aspects of the problem of police reform generally.

One of the most important questions involved here is why police establishments were altered when they were. Certainly, the problems of mass disorder and high crime rates were vital in indicating the need for change, but something more has to be offered to explain the reforms taking place when they did. One answer which has been suggested is that the creation of the Metropolitan Police in 1829 drove hordes of criminals out of London into the provincial boroughs and thus forced these districts to renovate their police establishments. The example of Bristol shows the flaws in this concept. Earlier attempts at reform demonstrate that the problem was of a longer standing, and in September 1827 the *Bristol Mercury* noted that crime figures for Bristol were worse than those for Middlesex, including London.

It is often suggested that the example and success of the Metropolitan force was enough to prompt other towns to reform their police establishments. It is asserted that the London scheme was an experiment which proved successful both in preserving the peace and in satisfying the public at large, and that as a result it was copied elsewhere. The problems here are made obvious by the example of Bristol. It was proposed that Bristol should copy London's example in 1830, before it could be judged as successful or not, and then, even after the Metropolitan Police Force had shown how effective it was, Bristol still did not imitate it in 1832. In Bristol, even after the shock of the 1831 Riots, the ruling classes were not sufficiently worried to accept what they considered to be an expensive and undesirable burden. Patently the example of London had not been enough to convince the people of Bristol that either the expense or the limitation upon liberty implied by a new police establishment was acceptable.

What finally ensured that the police establishment of Bristol would be reformed was the Municipal Corporations Act. This was

of crucial significance. No amount of anxiety about crime levels or fear of rioting could stimulate Bristol to reform. Several attempts at reform were made and failed. The fact of the matter is that the reform of the police was, in Bristol at least, a matter of political rather than of social or criminological considerations. Everyone knew some sort of reform was essential, yet political obstructions prevented effective action. Attempts at reform in the early 1830's failed because the old Corporation could command neither the respect nor the trust of the citizens as a whole. This Corporation by its very nature was reluctant to grant away any of its powers to such bodies as Police Commissions, while the rate-payers were equally reluctant to grant to the closed, exclusive and self-perpetuating Corporation either the funds or the patronage which a full-time professional force implied. As it happened, the Municipal Corporations Act forced the new Council to establish a police force, but if we consider the pressure for reform prior to 1835, and the zeal and good intentions with which the new Council set about the task, we must conclude that reform would almost certainly have taken place once the old Corporation was removed.

It was a mood of "liberal reform" which enabled Bristol to reconstruct its police establishment. Police reform, like so much nineteenth century social reform, was, in Bristol at least, a direct consequence of the removal of the old corrupt borough corporation, which was itself a logical sequel to the sweeping away of the rotten Parliamentary boroughs a few years before.

Bristol also throws some light upon the nature of the reformed forces themselves. There is much controversy about the degree to which borough forces after 1835 were able to emulate the achievements of the Metropolitan force and about whether they even wanted to do so. From what has been said earlier, it can be seen that Bristol certainly adopted many of the reforms enforced in London and that this was done deliberately and consciously with much hard work and effort. The mere passing of the Act in 1835 was not a magic wand which would reform all police forces in the boroughs of England without a good deal of local pressure. However, wherever one turns in official records, journals and pamphlets relating to Bristol, such expressions as "similar to the Metropolitan Police in both construction and regulation" are apparent. It seems indeed that this was a constant pre-occupation in Bristol. Of considerable importance in this respect is the fact that the first two men to hold the post of Superintendent were both experienced men from the London force and were given a more or less free hand in running the force and in recruiting and disciplining it.

We may conclude from looking at the experiences of some other towns that Bristol was not typical in this respect, but we must also conclude that at least one provincial borough, prodded by its Superintendents of Police, had by the late 1830's a police force, "assimilated, as near as may be, to the Metropolitan Police."⁽¹⁾

(1). *Bristol Gazette*, 19 May 1836.

APPENDIX

Figures taken from *Abstract of Returns Relating to Police in the Several Cities and Boroughs of England and Wales, Parliamentary Papers, 1854* (345) LIII 509.

All figures are for 1841 unless otherwise stated.

<i>Town</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>No. of Police</i>	<i>Cost of Force (p.a.)</i>
Bath	53,000	100	£5,078
Birmingham	183,000	396	£26,181
Bradford	103,000 (1851)	69 (1848)	£2,718 (1848)
Bristol	122,000	228	£12,478
Leeds	152,000	133	£7,607
Liverpool	286,000	615	£39,500
Manchester	235,000	328	£23,600
Newcastle	72,000	105	£5,864
Norwich	62,000	74	£2,695
Sheffield	111,000 (1844)	71 (1844)	£1,683 (1844)

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The records of the Bristol Constabulary are in the custody of the Avon Police Authority and are at present located in Kingsweston House. Some of them are available on microfilm in the Bristol Record Office. They include the Occurrence Books 1836-1838, 1838-1839 and 1839-1840, which give a daily log of events; the Registers of Constables, 1836-1905, which give the name, height, date of recruitment, previous occupation and date and cause of removal from the register of all the constables; the Register of Conduct 1858-1866, and the Record Book 1836-1877, which give miscellaneous information, reports, memoranda from the Watch Committee and clothing accounts. The records also give the expenses of the police establishment 1836-1838 and accounts of prisoners.

The archives of the Corporation in the Bristol Record Office include the Proceedings of the Watch Committee, which provide the most important single source for the early history of the Police Establishment, and the Proceedings of the Council. The Bristol Record Office also has a copy of the Police Regulation Book of 1836 as well as some useful unofficial record material.

The printed *Report of the Royal Commission on Municipal Corporations in England and Wales*, 1835, is invaluable for its comments of the position in Bristol just before the new Police Force was established.

The Report of the Select Committee on Police (Parliamentary Papers, 1852-3 (715) XXXVI. 161) and the *Abstract of Returns Relating to Police* (Parliamentary Papers, 1854 (345) liii. 509) both contain useful information.

The Bristol Public Library has bound copies of all the journals used in preparation of this paper. They include *The Bristol Gazette*, *The Bristol Mercury*, *The Bristol Mirror*, *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* and *The Times*.

Bristol Public Library has many interesting and useful pamphlets relating to the subject, but many of them are politically prejudiced.

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